

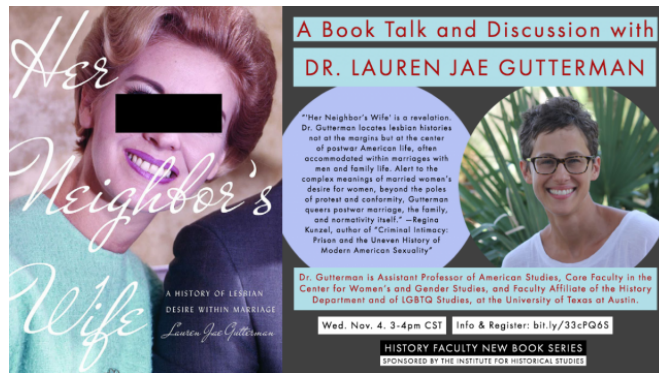
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## IHS Book Talk: "Her Neighbor's Wife: A History of Lesbian Desire Within Marriage," by Lauren Jae Gutterman, University of Texas at Austin (History Faculty New Book Talk)



The History Faculty New Book Series presents:

*Her Neighbor's Wife: A History of Lesbian Desire Within Marriage*  
(University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019)

A book talk and discussion with

**Lauren Jae Gutterman**

Assistant Professor of American Studies, and Women's & Gender Studies, and  
Faculty Affiliate, Department of History and LGBTQ Studies

The University of Texas at Austin

<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/ams/faculty/lg32432>



At first glance, Barbara Kalish fit the stereotype of a 1950s wife and mother. Married at eighteen, Barbara lived with her husband and two daughters in a California suburb, where she was president of the Parent-Teacher Association. At a PTA training conference in San Francisco, Barbara met Pearl, another PTA president who also had two children and happened to live only a few blocks away from her. To Barbara, Pearl was “the most gorgeous woman in the world,” and the two began an affair that lasted over a decade. Through interviews, diaries, memoirs, and letters, *Her Neighbor's Wife* traces the stories of hundreds of women, like Barbara Kalish, who struggled to balance marriage and same-sex desire in the postwar United States. In doing so, Dr. Lauren Jae Gutterman draws our attention away from the postwar landscape of urban gay bars and into the homes of married women, who tended to engage in affairs with wives and mothers they met in the context of their daily lives: through work, at church, or in their neighborhoods.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the lesbian feminist movement and the no-fault divorce revolution transformed the lives of wives who desired women. Women could now choose to divorce their husbands in order to lead openly lesbian or bisexual lives; increasingly, however, these women were confronted by hostile state discrimination, typically in legal battles over child custody. Well into the 1980s, many women remained ambivalent about divorce and resistant to labeling themselves as lesbian, therefore complicating a simple interpretation of their lives and relationship choices. By revealing the extent to which marriage has historically permitted space for wives' relationships with other women, *Her Neighbor's Wife* calls into question the presumed straightness of traditional American marriage.

*Her Neighbor's Wife* is the winner of the 2019 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians Book Prize.

“*Her Neighbor's Wife* is a revelation. Lauren Jae Gutterman locates lesbian histories not at the margins but at the center of postwar American life, often accommodated within marriages with men and family life. Alert to the complex meanings of married women's desire for women, beyond the poles of protest and conformity, Gutterman queers postwar marriage, the family, and normativity itself.”

—Regina Kunzel, author of *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*

“In a field dominated by studies of gay men (still), *Her Neighbor's Wife* offers an LGBT history that centers a gendered analysis of women's lives. It is a critical intervention in histories of marriage, same-sex desires, feminism, and therapeutic ideas of the authentic self.”

—Rebecca L. Davis, author of *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss*

“*Her Neighbor's Wife* is an engaging, highly readable sociocultural history that serves as a necessary and illuminating corrective to the general dearth of lesbian history. Lauren Jae Gutterman shows the concept of fluidity has a much deeper past than what is typically imagined and that heterosexual marriage was much less straight than it seemed.”

—Heather Murray, author of *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America*

**Lauren Jae Gutterman** graduated with a B.A. in American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies from Northwestern University. After completing her doctorate in twentieth-century U.S. History at New York University, Dr. Gutterman was a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows at the University of Michigan. In the fall of 2015, Professor Gutterman joined the American Studies Department at UT Austin. She is also a core faculty member in the Center for Women's & Gender Studies, and a faculty affiliate of LGBTQ Studies and the History Department. Professor Gutterman has published articles on the history of women, gender, sexuality, popular culture, digital history, and oral history in the *Journal of Social History*, *Gender & History*, *The Public Historian*, *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, and the *Oral History Review*. Her public writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Public Seminar*, *Jezebel*, *Slate*, *The Huffington Post*, *Notches: (Re)marks on the History of Sexuality*, and the Organization of American Historians' blog, *Process*. Her next book project, tentatively titled “Queer Survival,” examines changing understandings of the relationship between gender and sexual non-



conformity and surviving childhood sexual abuse since the late-nineteenth century. She is also the co-founder and co-host of the [Sexing History podcast](#).

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*Posted November 16, 2020*

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